

# Indiana House of Representatives

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## News and Information

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**April 4, 2005**

### **REP. TRENT VAN HAAFTEN'S STATEHOUSE REPORT**

INDIANAPOLIS – Education policy has taken center stage at the Statehouse in the past week. The Senate Appropriations Committee passed its version of the budget last week, which means the entire Senate will vote on the budget bill this week.

The Senate version of the budget provides a slight improvement for public education funding than the House Republican budget, but even the Senate's attempts will result in funding cuts to every school system in the 76<sup>th</sup> House District. As the session winds down to its final weeks, I remain hopeful that the Republican leaders in the General Assembly will change their emphasis from providing tax breaks to corporations to focusing more on education.

Early reports are not encouraging. While the Senate Republican plan provides a little more funding for schools, there are no minimum guarantees, which continues to raise the risk that local property taxes will have to be raised or programs will have to be cut and teachers laid off.

There have been a number of bills that we have considered and will consider that are education related issues. Last week the House passed Senate Bill 332, which requires school corporations to provide a daily opportunity for students to voluntarily recite the Pledge of Allegiance, as well as a daily moment of silence.

Senate Bill 285 also was passed by the House. It requires schools to adopt rules designed to stop bullying. Officials would have to establish safe school committees and provide added training for school safety specialists. People on both sides of the issue agree that the measure will not stop bullying from taking place, but advocates believe the bill would give teachers and administrators more tools to recognize and curtail the behavior.

Upcoming bills for consideration include Senate Bill 231, which changes the enrollment date for children attending kindergarten. A child who is five years of age by August 1 would be able to attend school that year. At present, a child must be five by July 1 in order to attend kindergarten that year. At a time when funding cuts are being proposed for schools, I am concerned we also are trying to increase class size by allowing more children into school at a younger age.

Senate Bill 200 will be considered this week. This bill would require all schoolchildren to enroll in the Core 40 curriculum, but allow parents to opt out of the program. Core 40 offers a series of advanced courses in all subjects, with a concentration in math and sciences. I believe it is always a good idea to encourage students to strive for higher standards, but we must also be prepared to have the resources to provide these added opportunities.

Senate Bill 371 is likely to be heard this week. This bill would move the ISTEP test from the fall to the spring, a change that is estimated to cost more than \$10 million. I would much rather see this funding be used to make up the money that North Posey, New Harmony, Mt. Vernon and Evansville will lose with the proposed budget. It makes absolutely no sense to me that we would spend so much money moving the date of a test when money is already being taken away from schools.

Daylight Savings Time will come before the House this week. This proposal will put all of Indiana on DST. However, the southwest and northwest corners of the State will remain on Central Time while the rest of the state is on Eastern Time. Our area will be an hour behind the rest of the state the entire year. Maybe my memory is bad, but I sure remember that

when our new governor was campaigning, he stated that it made the most sense for all of Indiana to be on Central Time.

I was able to amend a Senate Bill this week to allow for a student loan payment tax deduction. A second reading amendment that I proposed to Senate Bill 459 was adopted on Tuesday. This would allow a person to take a tax deduction of up to \$2,000 for student loan payments. I hope this is one small measure that will let young people know that Indiana wants them to remain in Indiana.

We are fast approaching the end of the session. April 11 is the last day for the House to adopt a Senate bill and April 29 is scheduled as the last day of the session. Since it is a budget year, there is a lot of anticipation for how and when the session will end.

The pace will be quick, and the air is full of rumors that Republicans will be calling for increased taxes on cigarettes, alcohol, gas and possibly additional gaming. At this point, these are only rumors. But all of us will be watching closely to see how your tax dollars will be appropriated for the next two years. At this point, House Democrats main goal is to protect those dollars and to avoid having a heightened property tax burden placed on Hoosiers.

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